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ABSTRACT

Illustrates progress made at Howard Community College (HCC) in the last three years in efforts to improve student learning, instructional effectiveness, and curriculum. Information for this progress report was compiled with input from offices involved in monitoring outcomes assessment of student learning at the college. These include the office of the vice president of academic affairs, the learning outcomes assessment office, and the planning, research and organizational development office. Emphasizes the college's commitment to change and innovation. Each year, HCC faculty and staff use assessment projects to identify activities that may steer the college through the waves of mounting educational change. Part one, Institutional Impact of Assessment, reviews information found in the Middles States accreditation review conducted at Howard Community College in fall 2001 and highlights how the assessment of student learning has affected educational processes at HCC. Part two, Programmatic Assessment, outlines the major changes and improvements that have taken place in selected academic programs as a result of assessment of student learning outcomes. Also provides four examples to illuminate some of the trends that are discussed and to demonstrate viable changes to student modes of inquiry within certain disciplines. (JS)

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Progress Report on Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

A Report to the Maryland Higher Education Commission

From
Howard Community College

June 1, 2001

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Executive Summary

Howard Community College (HCC) creates an environment that inspires learning and the lifelong pursuit of personal and professional goals. The college provides open access and innovative learning systems to respond to the ever-changing needs and interests of a diverse and dynamic community. As a vital partner, HCC is a major force in the intellectual, cultural and economic life of its community. (HCC Mission Statement)

This progress report illustrates how Howard Community College has improved student learning, instructional effectiveness, and curriculum over the past three years. It is compiled with input from key offices involved in monitoring outcomes assessment of student learning at the college. These include the office of the vice president of academic affairs, specifically the learning outcomes assessment office, and the planning, research and organizational development office.

As stated in the self-study report to the Middle States Association, "While we [HCC] do not approach change frivolously, the institutional culture does strongly encourage improvement."(p.2) The constants in the college continue to be change and innovation, underscored this year by the findings and charges brought forward by the Middle States review. Each year HCC faculty and staff use assessment projects to identify value-added activities to steer the college through the waves of mounting educational change. As HCC's enrollment grows (6% this year), time, money, staff, and physical space distributions must be reassessed often.

Part I: *Institutional Impact of Assessment* reviews information found in the Middle States accreditation review conducted at Howard Community College in FY2001 and highlights how the assessment of student learning has affected educational processes at HCC. HCC received a *commendable* rating from the Middle States Association for its self-study efforts.

Institutional assessment at HCC is composed of institutional surveys- IDEA (student evaluation of courses each semester), QUEST (annual employee satisfaction survey), YESS (annual student satisfaction survey) - and monthly examinations of segments of the board of trustees core ends (which includes all the mandated MHEC performance accountability indicators). Periodically, HCC conducts a general education assessment of entering and exiting students (Academic Profile). Performance gaps uncovered by this research are immediately considered and drive the area, unit, and individual work plans for the next performance review cycle.

Additionally, last year, the college committed to the use of the Baldrige framework for process improvement across the institution. This year the college plans to improve its procedures for 1) student selection for graduation, 2) crisis communication, and 3) computer disaster recovery. These audits will improve service to employees and students.

Part II: *Programmatic Assessment* outlines the major changes and improvements that have taken place in selected academic programs as a result of assessment of student learning outcomes. The major vehicle for these changes is the Learning Outcomes Assessment Program, which, since 1992, has assisted in the administration and analysis of individual course, related groups of courses, and program assessments. This program has adapted to concerns brought forth in the Middle States self-study process (a need to increase the amount of "leverage" a faculty member has in finding the time, resources and intellectual capital to put into an assessment project) by hiring a 12-month researcher entirely devoted to assessment and empowering the division chair to remove marginal responsibilities from the faculty to create more time to devote to the assessment task.

Over 100 assessments have been conducted. Most projects involve a 3-year "test-implement-retest" cycle. Results have been good indicators of improved student learning, student attitude, and advances in instructional effectiveness and curriculum. Examples include – improving success rates in a general education biology course by 17%, adjusting the cut-off scores of the math placement exam to allow more students into college level math without sacrificing their probability of successful completion, and improving the writing ability of students across the curriculum.

For more details on these ongoing assessment programs please visit the board core end system at: http://www.howardcc.edu/hcc/plan&eval/boardends.htm and the learning outcomes assessment website at: http://www.howardcc.edu/tli/loa/ .

Part I: Institutional Impact of Assessment

Howard Community College continues to grow: FY1999- 2%, FY2000- 3%, FY2001- 6%. Our retention, transfer and graduation rates are above the statewide average of the other community colleges.

	1996 Cohort	1997 Cohort	1998 Cohort	1999 Cohort	Benchmark 2004 Cohort
Second year retention rate	63.9	69.9	67.1	67.9	68.0
Statewide Average	64.2	65.0	65.0	63.3	

	1993 Cohort	1994 Cohort	1995 Cohort	1996 Cohort	Benchmark 2001 Cohort
Four-year transfer/graduation rate	40.8	36.5	37.9	34.0	37.3
Statewide Average			33.1	32.1	

	1991 Cohort	1992 Cohort	1993 Cohort	1994 Cohort	1999 Cohort
Six-year transfer/graduation rate of all students	24.4	31.5	30.3	32.3	32.5
Statewide Average	27.0	26.1	26.3	25.5	

	1993	1994	1995	1996	Benchmark 2001
Percent of students transferring to Maryland public four-year institutions	35.1	37.0	35.9	31.4	37.0
Statewide Average	28.9	28.0	28.7	27.5	

The college has made a concerted effort to examine and develop programs to improve these figures. For example, the *Enrollment Management Team* is a new and important resource in the assessment matrix at HCC. Convened shortly after the Middle States review had begun, the team consists of major decision makers from key areas on campus. Coping with extraordinary growth has necessitated the formation of this team. It looks at strategic priorities as set by the Board of Trustees and also interfaces with the planning council. This year, as HCC finds itself at a confluence of student growth and changing technological needs, this team has been particularly concerned with managing retention efforts, collaborative efforts for utilizing new technology, and process flow issues. Through their efforts, changes to program integrity have included: retention program changes, Student Web pages and the addition of the HCC Express (student web registration system).

HCC conducts an annual graduate follow-up survey (although only mandated to participate in the biennial MHEC one).

	1996 Graduates n=97	1998 Graduates n=119	Benchmark
Student Satisfaction with Job Preparation rated "very good," "good," or "fair"	98%	100%	98%
Student Satisfaction with Transfer Preparation rated "very good," "good," or "fair"	93%	98%	95%

HCC independent Survey	1998 Graduates n=119	1999 Graduates n=116
Goal Achieved completely or partly	98%	99%
Quality of Classroom Instruction rated "very good" or "good"	92%	92%
Overall Quality of College rated "very good" or "good"	94%	95%
Transfer Preparation rated "very good" or "good"	81%	77%
Employment Preparation rated "very good" or "good"	76%	80%
Would Attend HCC Again	90%	94%

HCC values its annual measure of student satisfaction as a key mechanism for monitoring the quality of service it provides to students. *The Yearly Evaluation of Services by Students (YESS) Survey*, with some modifications and one exception, has been used each spring for the past ten years.[1]

In general, the students surveyed are generally satisfied with college services, instruction, their own progress, and the campus environment. The YESS Survey shows some areas of dissatisfaction or significant differences in satisfaction between student subgroups. These results provide a roadmap that point to directions for improvement.

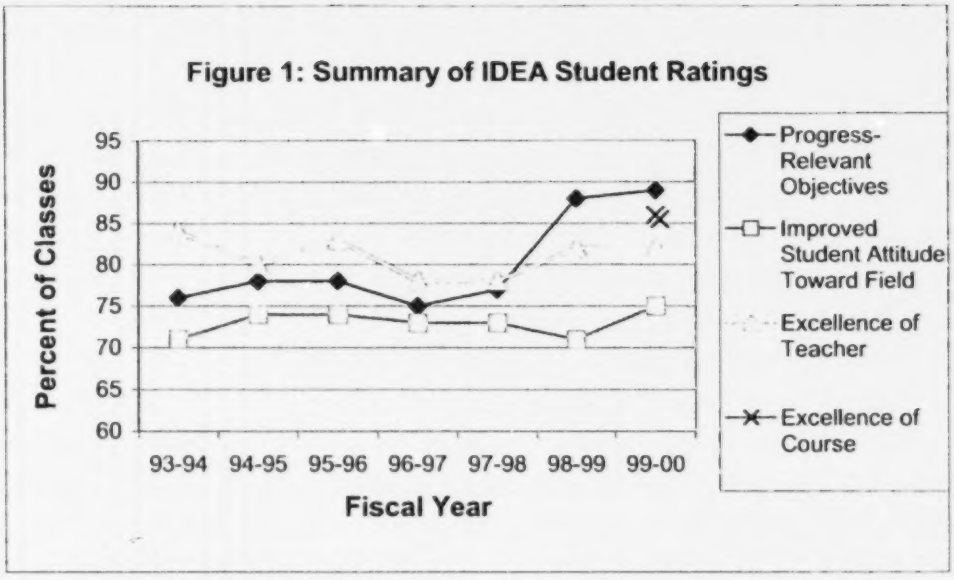
Significantly, 88% of the student respondents stated that they would recommend HCC to their friends and relatives and 86% said that if they had it to do over again they would enroll in HCC.

In the summer of 2000, HCC surveyed the summer students to determine their demographics, motivation for enrolling in summer programs and their satisfaction level in the courses and services provided. Completed surveys were received from 1119 of the 2029 students enrolled and 84% of the respondents would recommend HCC's summer session to others. Significantly, close to three fifths of the summer students did *not* count HCC as their "home" institution. HCC was rated higher than the students' home institutions in many areas including library facilities, quality of instruction, up-to-date technology and helpfulness of faculty and other staff.

HCC uses the *IDEA* survey, a nation-wide survey tool developed by Kansas State University, to measure teaching effectiveness and student satisfaction by course and teacher each major semester. In the past year, the IDEA survey posted higher gains in each major outcome measure rated by students and reported annually. The results are at or above 75% (70% being the college benchmark). The largest gain was in Improved Student Attitude Toward Field (4%). A new measure called "Excellence of Course" replaces the measure "Would Like Instructor Again." Ratings for HCC jumped 5 points given this new measure. (See Figure 1)

Moreover, a number of administrative transitions are underway to make testing more efficient and meaningful to students and faculty given the ubiquity of modern technologies on our campus. Plans to make forms and results more easily accessible via the intranet and new technologies should be in place early this Fall. Using faculty and chair feedback, scheduling changes this year will allow chairpersons to receive IDEA ratings in order to conference with professors in time for changes to be made the next semester.

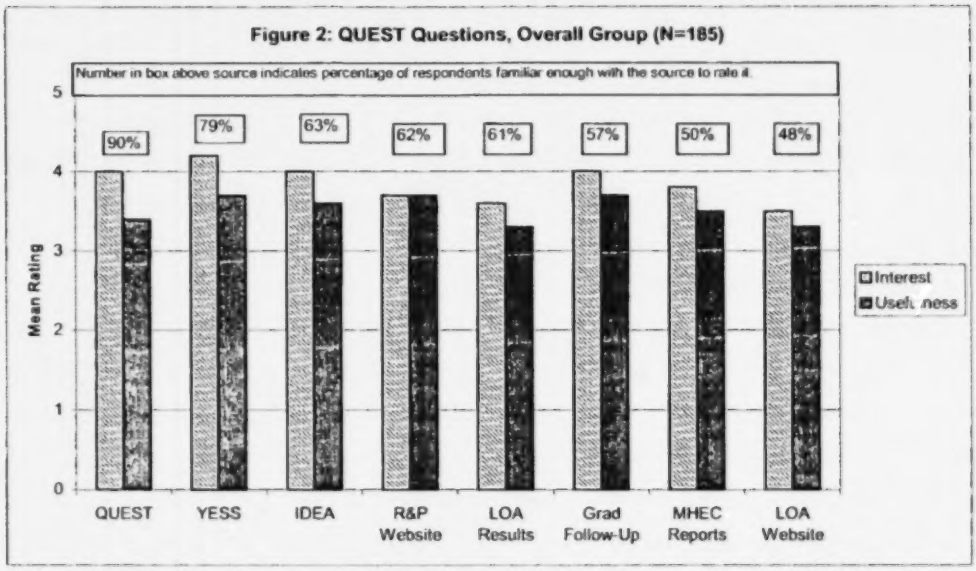
[1] In the Spring of 1997, HCC used the Student Assessment developed at the National Institute for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness at North Carolina State University.



The *Academic Profile* (a test developed by the Education Testing Service) is administered to incoming freshman and graduates to assess general educational proficiency using norm-referenced scores and criterion-referenced scores. The subject areas covered are humanities, social sciences and natural sciences with emphasis on writing, reading, critical thinking, and reading. The tests were given to HCC's entering and exiting classes once each every five years. Results from the tests were used to generalize about teaching conditions at the college including the level of learning that was happening at HCC relative to other schools that were using this test.

The annual *QUEST* (Quality Evaluation of Service Trends) survey affords all college employees (full and part-time) the opportunity to give their assessment of college services, campus climate, job satisfaction, and college leadership. Results of the survey give direction for decision-making and provide focal points for improvement activities and resource allocation.

Figure 2 summarizes the interest and usefulness of institutional outcomes studies as determined by questionnaires given the HCC faculty and staff at large. These findings indicate an overall familiarity with the outcomes studies at the institution.



Ongoing improvements to modes of instruction have been made in accordance to preferences that have been projected for our student population. As noted in the Middle States self-study, HCC uses the YESS and other assessment tools to determine the course educational modes should take; and whether full or part time, day or evening, traditional or non-traditional student populations are growing. In 1999, nontraditional courses at HCC had 16 telecourses, 12 fast track, 38 on-line, and 5 interactive courses, with an average pass rate of 76.25%. Assessments have guided the development of improved course offerings, including an online degree program, and the enhanced standards for nontraditional coursework.

Due in large part to HCC's strong and continual focus on improving retention rates, "learning communities" composed of student groups who proceed on specialized "learning tracks" have been developed at HCC. One such community is the Rouse Scholars, whose graduation success rates for the past 7 graduating classes, has been between 70-82%. This past fall, the Silas Craft Collegians, a community of learners whose level of past high school performance does not match their potential, has embarked on a learning journey. This community is representative of many learners at HCC; as such, their experiences may provide important tools cross-divisionally in assessing our learners and using best practices in learning communities at HCC.

Part II: Programmatic Assessment

A number of significant improvements have been implemented as a result of the Middle States Accreditation review. These improvements have a direct correlation to areas of concern articulated in the Middle States report. For example, the college can provide evidence of improving dissemination and presentation of data-driven initiatives in relation to entering freshman skill levels and retention statistics. Current projects also provide additional outreach and support to more part-time faculty and students in less traditional courses using a variety of teaching/learning modalities. Assessment projects are working to promote understanding at the

interdivisional level and also within different offices throughout the campus, in order to help bring about changes in retention rates and to promote assessment as a method to improve the institutional culture.

For the past 9 years course assessments have been conducted regularly throughout the college. This is the fifth year of the "test-implement-retest" cycle. Results have been good indicators of improved student learning, student attitude, and advances in instructional effectiveness and curriculum. Howard Community College's seven academic divisions had twenty-nine (29) projects in various stages of testing and implementation in FY00. Eleven new assessment projects were planned, developed and entered into the test phase. The majority of these projects will transition next year into the implementation phase. Seventeen new divisional, Continuing Education/Workforce Development or cross-curricular projects were committed to in FY2001.

Initiatives stemming from the Board of Trustees, the Enrollment Management team and subcommittees, the offices of Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Outcome Assessment Programs will show the pivotal role that such reviews affect on student learning at the division and course levels. Selected programs will be discussed. Each year two internal program-level reviews assess the cost-benefit of each program, student success rate, FTEs, and recommendations regarding their future. In FY2001 the Science and Technology Division performed a review of the plant science program, and the Business and Computer Division performed a review of the office technology program. Results from these program assessments are communicated both laterally and vertically in the college structure. In this way decisions about enrollment and admissions are affected, as well as hiring and resource allocations. For example, when advising students about courses to take, the admissions office is currently relying on information provided by professors who have undertaken outcomes assessment projects. Working with their division chairs, project leaders' ideas have been put into policy and changed course sequencing both in Math (both differential equations and algebra) and the suggested way that ESL students move through English courses.

Assessments involving a single course or a group of related courses are performed under the guidance of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Program. Course assessment is structured as a three-year experience in which faculty conduct primary research in the classroom assessing some aspect of teaching and learning in respect to student success. The assessment process relies on a test-revise-retest cycle that will commonly stretch over the three-year period. Projects assess all students from all sections within a given course. Faculty base their assessment efforts on an outside standard and construct a hypothesis, suggest and implement improvements, and retest up to the standard if not previously met. Surveys and other data are gathered and analyzed with the assistance of professional coordinators and researchers. Two projects are completed per division a year.

Numerous course improvements have resulted from learning outcomes assessment studies. In addition to providing information about student achievement, additional benefits result from the process of planning and implementing studies. Other activities:

- Learning to integrate assessment standards into course work over the long term
- Aligning objectives across all sections of the course
- Matching learning hierarchies with course objectives

- o Integrating outcomes objectives with unit work, individual work plans and promotion plans
- o Understanding division (unit) work in relation to ones own course outcome assessment
- o Improving dissemination of outcome assessment information and enriching the assessment process by including more part-time faculty.

The examples that follow illuminate these trends and demonstrate viable changes to student modes of inquiry within certain disciplines.

Example 1: Biology107
During FY01 an HCC faculty member from the Science and Technology Division effectively challenged the learning status quo in her Biology 107 classes. Her outcome assessment project shows evidence of improved teaching and learning and has made an impact throughout the biological sciences program at HCC. By tagging on the assessment at the end of a promotion project, she created a biology CD-ROM that allows students to repeatedly practice the new concepts they are learning in biology. Moreover, her assessment, like many others, focused on unifying all sections around key course objectives, and incorporating the assessment tool (it also allows students to test themselves) into the teaching objectives. Over 3 years success rates improved 17% for all biology sections.

Example 2: Math Programs
Most recently, the math division has undertaken an assessment initiative that will have far-reaching impacts for students currently enrolled at HCC and those who may choose to enroll in the future. By combining several course assessments into one longitudinal analysis, the division leveraged their resources to look at the success rate of 4 classes over time. Outcomes have allowed the division to evaluate the necessity of course prerequisites, the cut-off point of placement test grades, and provided the ability to more accurately advise students. The assessment, which includes many members of the Math faculty, Division chair and five offices throughout campus shows an increasing improvement in communication among faculty, division chairs and administrators to achieve long-term college objectives via reordering course sequencing for greater student success. When completed, data shall be available within the college on a web-site and also at a symposium for dissemination.

Example 3: Writing Intensive
The Writing Intensive Program is assessed every few years through studies designed by members of the English department. This past year a program entitled "Writing Across the Curriculum" was analyzed. In this assessment study, student writing samples from courses both in the Sociology and English Divisions were compared using a common rubric (based on reasoning, organization and conventions). Interestingly, the study highlighted important distinctions between sociological construction of written work (based mainly on content) and literary or grammatical approaches (based mainly on style and expressional form). Faculty worked cross-divisionally to find common ground upon which solid written works can be assessed. The outcomes of this study have the potential to form the much-needed foundation for future writing assessments upon which all norming in both the Sociology and English division can be based.

Example 4: Ethics

Three assessments concerning values, ethics and ethical conduct are ongoing at the college currently. These modes of inquiry utilize industry-based assessment alternatives to find outside standards against which to measure HCC course content. The studies are in the field of health education and English. These efforts may bring important information to bear on campus wide Ethics-days events once completed.

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